

THE BATTLE OF NANSAN.

22ND MAY TO 26TH MAY, 1904.

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I. DESCRIPTION OF THE BATTLEFIELD.

Extent.—Roughly speaking the battlefield is bounded on the north by the hills north of the town of Kinchau; on the east by Ta-ho-shang-shan; on the south by Talienwan Bay; and on the west by Nan-kwan-ling Hill and Kinchau Bay.

Hills.—The principal feature is the line of Nansan—Nan-kwan-ling Hills, running from the town of Kinchau in a southerly direction; these hills formed the main Russian position. About the centre they are some 300 ft. in height, but on the flanks towards Talienwan and Kinchau Bays they are much lower. Nan-kwan-ling is about 800 ft. in height, and indirect fire on the country about Yen-chia-tun was freely used from it by the Russians. Ta-ho-shang Mountain (2,000 ft.) is a very rough and rugged mass of hills, the slopes of which command the Kinchau position, and was largely used by the Japanese for Artillery positions.

The Isthmus or narrow neck of land between Kinchau and Talienwan Bays is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles wide, very flat, and hardly above sea level. The ground generally is stony, wet and sandy, affording little or no cover for an advance against the Nansan position.

Roads.—The principal roads in the area are :—

1st. The Port Arthur—Su-kia-tun—Kinchau—Shi-san-li-tai route to Pulantien (Port Adams) and Liao-yang.

2nd. The Kinchau—Wan-chia-tun route to Pitsewo.

3rd. A route from Pitsewo to Kinchau, *via* the south base of Ta-ho-shang-shan.

All these roads were of an inferior character, rough and in indifferent condition.

Railway.—The Siberian or Manchurian railway runs through the area in a south-west direction, passing a little to the east of Kinchau and thence close under the base of Nansan Hills to Ta-fang-shan

Station (head of Talienwan Bay). At the station the line diverges, the main line going west, *vid* base of Nan-kwan-ling Hill, to Port Arthur, while a branch runs south to Talienwan. The line was in good order and was freely used by the Russians in their retreat from Kinchau.

Towns.—Kinchau is a large Chinese city, about 700 yards long by 600 yards wide, surrounded by a wall 30 ft. high. It is of little use as a military position as it is commanded by hills on the north, east and south-east sides, within easy artillery range, and though occupied as an advanced post by the Russians, it was not seriously held.

There are a number of small villages scattered about the area, but none of them are of any importance.

The Weather.—All through the 25th May, there was a very strong wind, succeeded by heavy rain. There was a very severe storm with lightning about 2 a.m. on 26th, and the bad weather prevented the Japanese Naval detachment (in Kinchau Bay) coming into action as early as had been intended. There was a very thick fog early on the 26th May, which necessitated postponing the opening of artillery fire till 5.30 a.m., an hour after the appointed time.

II. THE OPPOSING FORCES AND THEIR DISPOSITIONS.

A. THE RUSSIAN FORCES.

(a). *Military.*

The Russian troops available for the defence of the Nansan position were :—

In command—General Stoessel, Commanding IV. Siberian A.C.

4th East Siberian Rifle Division (Gen. Fock)	{	1st Brigade (Gen. Dimitrowski)...	{	13th Regt. (3 battalions)
		2nd Brigade (Gen. Nadjekin) ...	{	14th Regt. (3 battalions)
4th East Siberian Rifle Artillery Brigade ...	{		{	15th Regt. (3 battalions)
			{	16th Regt. (3 battalions)
			{	5th Regt. (3 battalions)
			{	2 batteries—16 guns.

In addition to the above there were technical troops, some sailors employed in manning the heavy guns, and 5 companies of Railway Guards.

The Nansan position stretched across the isthmus, from Kinchau Bay to Talienwan Bay, Kinchau town being held as an advanced post on the left, while the batteries about Ho-shang-tao formed a support to the right of the position. Nansan Hill itself was strongly fortified, with 14 gun batteries and numerous trenches; the front and north flank were also well defended by barbed wire entanglements, deep military pits and contact or observation mines. There were search lights at Hon-ying, Tso-ying and Yang-pao-ying.

The gun batteries were as follows (No. 1 being at the south point of the defences, No. 8 at the north, and so on) :—

Nansan Hill.—No. 1, eight field guns 8·7 cm.; No. 2, four guns 8·7 cm.; No. 3, four guns 10·5 cm.; No. 4, one gun 15·45 cm.; No. 5, two guns 8·7 cm.; No. 6, four guns 15 cm. and 4 mortars 15 cm.; No. 7, four guns 8·7 cm.; No. 8, four field guns 8·7 cm.; No. 9, four field guns 8·7 cm. and 4 guns 8·7 cm.; No. 10, six field guns 8·7 cm. and 2 guns 8·7 cm.; No. 11, not armed; No. 12, not armed, ammunition store; No. 13, two field guns 8·7 cm.; No. 14, two guns 8·7.

Kinchau.—Two guns 7·5 cm.; two guns 8·7 cm.

Nan-kwan-ling.—Four guns 8·7 cm.

Above Ta-fang-shan.—Two guns 15 cm.; two guns 10·5 cm.

Various.—Five guns 15 cm.; two guns 12 cm.

The heavier calibre guns were chiefly guns taken from the Chinese when the Russians acquired Port Arthur.

On Nansan Hill, the batteries on the north slopes fired chiefly to the north, over Kinchau Bay; the batteries on the east slopes fired to north and east and south-east, while those on the south slopes fired south, south-east and south-west.

The fieldworks on Nansan and Nan-kwan-ling Hills were of a very ordinary type; the batteries, trenches, entanglements, pits, etc., being of designs very similar to those shown in our *Manual of Military Engineering*.

The following points are noticeable :—

1st. The trenches followed the contours of the ground; they had a low command and were blinded in parts; there were good covered communications from the batteries to the trenches.

2nd. The batteries were well revetted and well traversed; shell stores under the traverses; guns about 33 ft. from centre to centre.

3rd. The principal batteries were connected by telegraph and telephone.

4th. Wire entanglements were very largely used; nearly the whole front and north flank being protected by them; the posts were 5 ft. high.

The outpost line was approximately Shi-san-li-tai ($3\frac{1}{2}$ m. north-east of Kinchau)—Palichwang—Yang-pao-ying.

The total force comprised about 11,000 infantry, 2 field batteries, 500 railway guards, 1,500 sailors, technical troops, etc.; total about 13,400 men with 70 guns.

(b). *Naval.*

The Naval detachment was as follows :—

Gunboat *Bobr*

Destroyer *Burni*

„ *Boiki*

5 steam launches used as transports

} In Talienwan Bay.

B. THE JAPANESE FORCES.

(a). *Military.*

The Japanese Military force was as follows :—

In command—General Oku, Commanding II. Japanese Army.

I. Division.	{	1st Brigade	{	1st Regt.
Lt.-Gen. Prince Fushimi.		2nd Brigade	{	15th Regt.
			{	2nd Regt.
			{	3rd Regt.
III. Division.	{	5th Brigade	{	6th Regt.
Lt.-Gen. Oshima.		17th Brigade	{	33rd Regt.
			{	18th Regt.
			{	34th Regt.
IV. Division.	{	7th Brigade	{	8th Regt.
Lt.-Gen. Ogawa.		19th Brigade	{	37th Regt.
			{	9th Regt.
			{	38th Regt.

Independent Artillery Brigade (1 regiment)—Maj.-Gen. Uchiyama.

The total strength was 36 battalions, 144 guns (108 with the Divisions, and 36 with the Independent Artillery Brigade), and miscellaneous troops ; or about 45,000 men and 144 guns.

(b). *Naval.*

The Naval Detachment comprised :—

Gunboat <i>Akagi</i>	{	In Kinchau Bay.
„ <i>Chokai</i>		
„ <i>Tsu-kushi</i>		
„ <i>Heirgen</i>		

III.—NARRATIVE OF EVENTS.

22nd May.—The Russians held the Nansan position, their outposts having been driven in during the period 16th May to 22nd May, 1904. The Japanese were occupied in reconnoitring the position.

23rd May.—The Japanese, who had advanced by the following routes :—

IV. Division : Shih-san-li-tai—Kinchau,

I. Division : road south of Ta-ho-shang-shan—Kinchau,

III. Division : Pitsewo—Kinchau,

occupied the line Chiu-li-chwang—Chen-chia-tien—Chiu-li-tai (3 m. north north-east of Kinchau), with outposts along the base of the

Ta-ho-shang-shan. The general results of the reconnoissances premised :—

(a). About 8 heavy guns on Ho-shang-tao facing Talienwan Bay; some fired north-east towards Hon-ying; calibre could not be ascertained.

(b). The works at Nansan Hill held guns of following calibres, 20 cm., 15 cm. short Canets, 10 cm., 8·6 cm., 7·6 cm., and some Q.F. field guns.

(c). Wire entanglements were in position from Yen-chia-tun round base of Nansan Hill to Kinchau.

(d). There was a small work on the heights of Nan-kwan-ling.

(e). Search lights were in position at Hon-ying, Tso-ying, and Yang-pao-ying.

The Russians on this date were well aware of the Japanese strength, and estimated their force at about 45,000.

24th May.—The general advance of the Japanese began. Further reconnoissance showed that the south defences of Nansan Hill were possibly not quite so strong as those to the east and north. Orders for the attack of the position on 25th May were issued. A naval detachment was instructed to co-operate, in Kinchau Bay.

25th May.—Owing to the bad weather the Japanese Naval detachment was unable to co-operate with the land forces, and the attack was consequently postponed. The outpost line was however pushed in further towards the Russian position, and there was a general artillery engagement between 5.30 a.m. and 9 a.m. Further reconnoissance showed that the entrenchments on Nansan were still under construction. At 6 p.m. orders for the attack were again issued.

IV. Division : to attack Kinchau, and left flank of Nansan.

I. Division : to move direct on Nansan.

III. Division : to attack right flank of Nansan.

Independent Artillery Brigade : to take up a position about 2 miles east of Nansan, on the slopes of Ta-ho-shang-shan.

Attack to take place at daybreak; artillery to open fire at 4.30 a.m.

The Russians used their military balloons very freely this day; ten balloons were up for about 6 hours, and though constantly fired at, none of them were hit.

26th May.—*12 midnight.*—The IV. Division attacked Kinchau; but owing to the very bad weather and the darkness, had to desist.

5.20 a.m.—Part of the I. Division succeeded in capturing Kinchau, blowing in the north gate. The Russian detachment, some 600 strong, suffered severely in the retreat.

5.30 a.m.—Owing to the thick fog it was not possible to commence the artillery bombardment at the hour ordered, but from 5.30 a.m. to 9 a.m. a heavy fire was kept up on Nansan.

6 a.m.—The Japanese Naval detachment opened fire on Nansan from Kinchau Bay ; owing to the rising tide the gunboats were able to push well in, and maintained a very severe fire on the left rear of the position.

9.30 a.m.—The Russian fire, which up to this time had been very heavy, appeared to slacken. The Japanese infantry commenced their attack, advancing all along the line by a series of rushes to within 300 to 500 yards of the entanglements ; but could get no closer. The two Russian field batteries retired to Nan-kwan-ling, from which point they kept up a very heavy indirect fire on the Japanese III. Division south of Yen-chia-tun.

10 a.m.—The Russian gunboat *Bobr* appeared in Talienwan Bay east of Ho-shang-tao, and kept up a vigorous fire on the III. Division which suffered severely. The Russians also tried to land a party from steam launches, but the attempt failed.

11 a.m.—By this hour some of the Russian guns on Nansan had been silenced, but the fire from the Russian position generally was still so heavy that the infantry attack could make no progress.

2 p.m.—The position of the III. Division was now rather critical. It was under a heavy fire from Nansan and Nan-kwan-ling, while on the left flank the Russian gunboat *Bobr* was still in action. Some little assistance however was given to it by the fire of the Japanese gunboats *Akagi* and *Chokai*, which kept up a heavy bombardment of Nansan, and to a certain extent held the Russian batteries on North Nansan in check. The *Chokai* lost her captain, but their light draught enabled both vessels to remain in Kinchau Bay, and there is no doubt that their fire contributed considerably to the final success of the attack.

5 p.m.—The Officer Commanding the Artillery reported that the gun and wagon supply of ammunition was running out, and General Oku decided to make a determined infantry attack all along the line. This was done, and nine attacks were made with the greatest bravery but with little success.

7 p.m.—About this hour the IV. Division, assisted by the Japanese Naval detachment, managed after a severe fight in the water to gain a footing on the north of Nansan Hill ; a general vigorous advance was then pushed all along the line, and by 7 p.m. the Japanese infantry occupied the whole position. The Russians retreated to Nan-san-shih-li-pao, and there was no further fighting.

The Japanese losses were :—Killed, 33 officers, 716 other ranks ; wounded, 100 officers and 3,355 other ranks.

The Russians had 10 officers and 694 other ranks killed, who were buried by the Japanese on the field of battle, the total losses being about 4,000. Their losses in guns were :—heavy and field guns of different kinds 68, machine guns 10.

IV. COMMENTS.

1. *The Russian Plan of Operations.*

The Nansan position formed the extreme east line of defence of Port Arthur, and was a natural one for the Russian Commander to take up. The general line held was, as far as land defence goes, a strong one, especially against attack by infantry; but the slopes of Ta-ho-shang-shan formed good positions for the Japanese artillery, and were a distinct disadvantage to the defenders.

The real weak points of the position were however the flanks, as these were both within easy artillery range from ships in Kinchau and Talienwan Bays. Fortunately for the Russians the gunboat *Bobr* and two destroyers held Talienwan Bay; but the final success of the Japanese was very largely due to the heavy fire kept up on the left flank of Nansan Hill by the Japanese Naval detachment; in fact it is very doubtful whether the position would have been taken if the Naval detachment had been unable to come into action.

With regard to the actual conduct of the defence, it is rather curious that the Russians did not make a vigorous counter attack, about 5 p.m. on the 26th, on the Japanese left flank round the south of Nansan Hill. The Japanese III. Division had suffered severely all through the afternoon, and it is probable that a sharp counter attack would have seriously inconvenienced the attacking forces. Possibly the want of troops was the reason for the purely defensive tactics practised by the Russians; but with the large number of troops available at Port Arthur, it seems unfortunate that an extra brigade could not have been spared for offensive operations. Probably the defenders felt so confident of holding the position that they did not think offensive tactics necessary.

2. *The Japanese Plan of Operations.*

Owing to the very limited front the Japanese Commander had little choice of ground on which to make his attack. Virtually a direct frontal attack all along the line was necessary, as the position could not be approached in any other way, at all events in the early stages of the action.

The employment of the Naval detachment in Kinchau Bay was of very great importance; and had more ships been able to take part in the attack, the battle might have been won at a very much earlier hour and at a far smaller cost. The Japanese do not seem to have been aware of the presence of the Russian Naval detachment in Talienwan Bay, or no doubt some of the Japanese ships would have been detailed to deal with it.

With regard to the question of frontal attacks against entrenched positions, there can be little doubt that, on this occasion, such attacks

failed. The final success of the operations was due to the combined fire of the land and sea artillery, and to the magnificent flank attack of the Japanese IV. Division.

The general lesson of the action seems to be that a direct attack against an enemy well entrenched in a good position is almost certain to fail; and that success can only be attained by operating against the flanks, or against some particular weak point in the position, simultaneously with the direct attack.

3. *Reconnaissance.*

The very careful manner in which the Japanese reconnoitred the Russian position should be noted. The greatest care was taken to try and discover the positions of the guns, trenches, obstacles, etc., and at least *four days* were devoted to this work alone. The result was most successful; for when the assault really commenced on the 26th May, the Japanese Commander had very full information as to the enemy's position and was considerably assisted thereby in making his preparations for the attack.

4. *Artillery.*

The principal points to notice about the Japanese artillery are :—
(1) The skilful manner in which it supported the infantry attack, and
(2) the excellent combined action of the land and sea artillery forces.

The Russian artillery worked well, especially the two field batteries at Nan-kwan-ling and the Naval detachment in Taliénwan Bay; but the guns on Nansan Hill appear to have been a good deal exposed, and it was probably on this account that they were unable to obtain the best results.

5. *Engineers.*

The Russian position was strongly entrenched and well provided with wire entanglements, military pits and land mines. The type of gun shelter used does not seem to have been a good one; but the obstacles were very effective, and would have been more so if the wet weather of the 25th—26th May had not caused the positions of the mines to show up so much.

The Japanese Engineers showed great skill and courage; the destruction of the gate of Kinchau Castle and the cutting of the land mine cables, both operations being conducted under heavy fire, were splendid feats of arms and highly creditable to the Japanese scientific corps.

NOTE.—The plan is reproduced from the *Voennyi Sboenik* by the kind permission of the Russian Imperial Military Authorities. As most of the places have different names in Chinese, Russian and Japanese, the names which appear to be most commonly used in the different accounts of the battle have been inserted on the plan.

THE BATTLE OF NANSAN.

Positions at 12 noon on 26th May, 1904.



REFERENCES.

Russians	—	Entrenchments	—————	Guns	++++	Search Lights	⊗
Japanese	—	Troops	—————	Guns	中中中		